

[Oops! That was me; this is just so unconscionable.] At that point, she said, “the boy stood up and pointed to...the three classroom ‘coaches’ huddled around a walkie-talkie. ‘Miss,’ he said, ‘don’t listen to them! You be you. Talk to me! I’m a person! Be a person, Miss. Be you!’ I thought that boy deserved a prize, instead of a detention.”

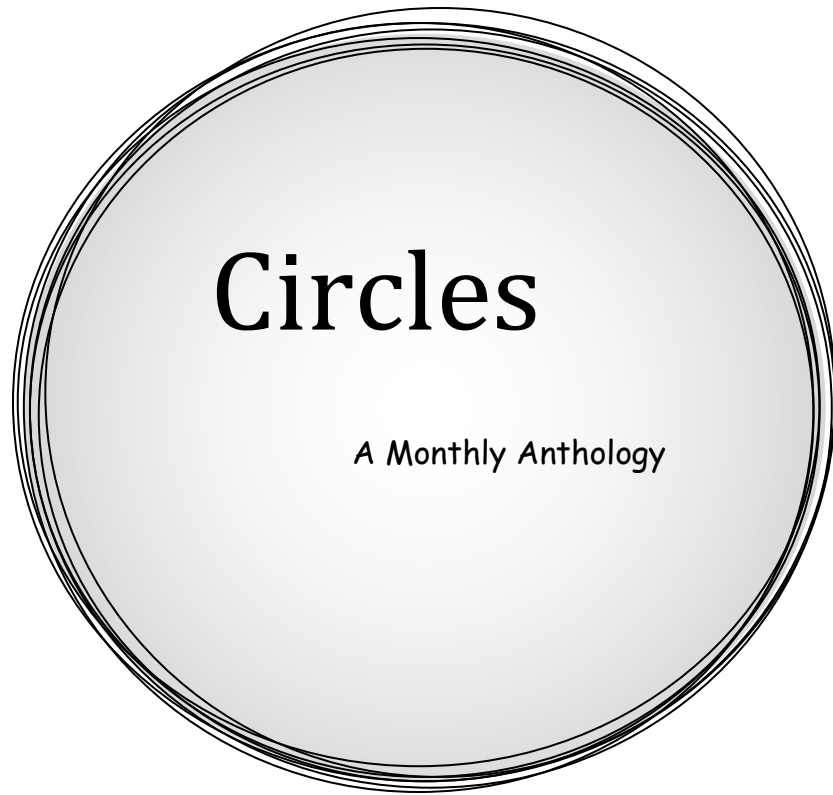


Editor

Matt Kundert

Contributors

Hazel Glass, Jane Kundert



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Naturalists and Philosophers, the theological method would have been pursued, and we should have had theories as numerous as the attempts to reconcile the story of Jonah with human experience, and science would be where it was at first. Theology generally sowed dry-shod over the first question, — *What are the facts?* — ‘with its garlands and singing-robcs about it.’ Its answer to the next query is therefore of no value.” — Theodore Parker, “Thoughts on Theology,” *Dial*, April 1842

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“So, a reason that you don’t have a lot of faith in a Democratic National Convention choosing a candidate that you would be happy with is—you’ve probably never been a participant in any kind of Convention of any kind. Whereas historically, ya know, state Constitutional Conventions were held all the time. Constitution-like Conventions held in towns and cities for all kinds of activities, it was like the main mode other than voting. People participated as citizens and sometimes they’re called Citizen Assemblies. But that very act of like gathering together with a bunch of random people to kind of make a decision about something—that’s what polling replaced.... We’re not in the habit of sitting in a room and arguing things out, building a coalition, arriving at some kind of decision, accepting that nobody gets what they want, that compromise is important. And so no one trusts the Convention as a—any more than they trust elections. I think people trust Conventions a lot less cuz they don’t know what that means.” — Jill Lepore, *The Last Archive*, March 7

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“Too many of us have accepted a statistical interpretation of our lives, and thus much of that which makes us [black people] a source of moral strength to America goes unappreciated and undefined.” — Ralph Ellison, “That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview,” *Shadow and Act*

—

“All evil is perverted good, and all falsehood is reversed truth. Therefore, the tri-une mystery, that pervades the universe, is embodied in shapes of evil, as well as of good. Hatred, Falsehood, and Force take an infinite variety of forms, as do Love, Truth, and Energy. If the proportion between falsified truth and perverted affection be harmonious, the product has power to

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

— Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale”



Benediction: A Reading from the Book of Emerson

From *Essays*, “Self-Reliance”

Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued advisor who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, “What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?” my friend suggested,—“But these impulses may be from below, not from above.” I replied, “They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil’s child, I will live then from the Devil.” No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.

*What if what you think is **right** is actually **wrong**?* There is, ultimately, nothing we can say to this—like Cartesian doubt, there is no final answer, and so we must act from our own sense of right. For whose else would you use? To imitate someone else’s sense of right, without it really being yours, is when ideas become ideology. Emerson called it conformity, and said that it was suicide. This actually puts a burden on us, a strong one—Emerson’s self-reliance on this point becomes Socratic self-examination, a responsibility to make sure an idea or commitment, any strong reaction to life, is yours and not simply an imitation. An identity, in this Emersonian sense, is not something you inherit, but something you create through active affirmation.

But of course, that’s not how Emerson put it. Emerson’s provocative shrug at the prospect of descending from the Prince of Evil is one segment of a *tour de force* of the essay, the long paragraph that begins: “Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist.” The major set-piece of the paragraph

however one wants to botanize the varieties. It is, in essence, to *reject the conversation*, to leave the marketplace of argument, and choose silence over answering the questions put to one. And one at that point must hope that punching doesn't fill the void.

It's kind of a Manichean picture—'either we're punching with fists or gripping with reasons!'—but that's pretty much what I think the continuum is. The "social contract" isn't a myth—it's an ongoing decision. The thing that mediates between the two we might call *manners*, but basically social norms. We can be gripped by reasons, but also choose not to do anything about it. We might tell them to others, and hear different ones in return, and nobody does anything. We might even talk about reasons we are unclear about, or the grip of things quite unlike reasons (say a poem, or God). But the manners of the conversation don't move people to *argue*, and certainly not to violence. A liberal society would be one that kept that space as wide as possible when possible.



Editor's Table, April 2024

My table was ballooned with books about Aristotle for the last month, so I am glad to have have him banished back downstairs. Sometimes you just have to get it out. The "term paper," in fact, is a bit of that hot air, homework-style. It came from an early draft of the Series that went off in the wrong direction, which I was going to ditch. But I noticed it has a rhythm I have been trying to develop—say something concrete, then draw your conclusions, however outlandish they may seem. It's not an academic style, though it is effectively the way I would write philosophy papers when I was an undergrad. Once I learned from the philosophers themselves that you could pretty much say any damn thing, and defend it no matter how paradoxical or absurd, the trick of writing papers became easier: make sure in the first half to demonstrate your concrete knowledge of the subject, and then you can gesture wherever you want—can't be any worse than denying causation or asserting a Blobular One. I started teaching my students this, too, about what to do in their Conclusions. In any closely-argued body, you are earning the right to make up some shit at the end. You can only argue for so much, so a good ending will have to gesture. If your audience sees that you have a thick trunk, they should let you go out on a limb a little.

Tho as she backward cast her busie eye,
To search each secret of that goodly sted
Ouer the dore thus written she did spye
Be bold; she oft and oft it ouer-red,
Yet could not find what sence it figured:
But what so were therein or writ or ment,
She was no whit thereby discouraged
From prosecuting of her first intent,
But forward with bold steps into the next roome went.

The warlike Mayde beholding earnestly
The goodly ordinance of this rich place,
Did greatly wonder ne could satisfie
Her greedy eyes with gazing a long space,
But more she meruaild that no footings trace,
Nor wight appear'd, but wastefull emptinesse,
And solemne silence ouer all that place:
Straunge thing it seem'd, that none was to possesse
So rich purueyance, ne them keepe with carefulnesse.

And as she lookt about, she did behold,
How ouer that same dore was likewise writ,
Be bold, be bold, and euery where *Be bold*,
That much she muz'd, yet could not construe it
By any ridling skill, or commune wit.
At last she spyde at that roomes vpper end,
Another yron dore, on which was writ,
Be not too bold; whereto though she did bend
Her earnest mind, yet wist not what it might intend.

— Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Bk 3, Canto 11, St
50, 53-54 (from Emerson's *Parnassus*)



Series: Begging the Question

1. One of my biggest pet peeves is the broad, very common use of the phrase “begs the question” to mean “prompts us to ask the next question.” I feel like a prig, but that is just not what that means. It’s a solecism. I am a

However, one might start here: What kind of argument would be the *best* to have? Well, since one is arguing about what is true, if you could deploy something you were *certain was true*, and say ‘since X is true, Y is true,’ then you would have *demonstrated* that hey wait a minute! We’ve seen this already—the best argument is *deductive*, one that argues ‘if Premise 1 is true, and Premise 2 is true, then Conclusion 3 follows.’ Since everyone is producing their own deductive arguments, the structure of the marketplace of argument is defined by defenses of your own premises and attacks on your opponents’. One can attack premises directly by justifying why one rejects the premise of an opponent—these are *refutations*—but one can also attack the reasoning in one’s opponent’s defenses, for example finding a conclusion faulty because *wrongly drawn*, or the whole *line of reasoning* faulty—1-2-3—because it begs the question, is circular. *Ignoratio elenchi*, *petitio principii*, and other “false reasonings” are the topic of *Sophistical Refutations*.

The question Aristotle doesn’t consider deeply enough is *Why is all knowledge not functionally dialectical?* Aristotle’s treatment of science in the *Posterior Analytics* suggests that there is a marketplace of science *next to* a marketplace of argument, one where science reigns supreme over argument, whereas I can only imagine an engulfing marketplace of argument with smaller marketplaces of science ensconced within, where science is one kind of argument. I have come to think knowledge is dialectical because the reasons why Aristotle and, say, the theologians of Christianity were so certain aren’t as creditable. On the side of traditional religions, the authority of the prophetic voice has diminished significantly in the last two and half thousand years as has supernaturalism. Aristotle’s certainty that there must be demonstrative knowledge amounts to ‘Well, it has to be that way—there has to be something called *demonstrative knowledge*, because that’s the *form of knowledge*, of being *certain* about something—I am certain *because* X, Y, and therefore Z.’ This leads him to argue that there must be something we *intuit* to be true, can be *absolutely certain* to be true though its certainty comes not from demonstration but something like a sensation. (This is effectively how I read his reasoning about how to avoid an infinite regress at 72b5-25 of the *Posterior Analytics*.) One can see his point, yet why shouldn’t we reject his (obviously Platonic) premise that the form of something is the best instance of it? And really, isn’t the central problem this absolute, pure certainty being posited as possible? *Don’t we all pretty much live most of our lives in a state of being pretty sure about pretty much everything?* If someone really presses you on how you can be so *perfectly certain* about something, and keeps asking, ‘Why, why, why, why,’ one eventually has to give up—either the

This is a tough subject because it is the subject of logic, the form of reasoning. I'm not entirely sure that "reasoning" is very different from "arguing," though everywhere we distinguish between logic and rhetoric, for example. However, I do know that logic is *dry*, so dry that I'm guessing most have already checked out and moved on to the hymn below. (It's soooo close! You can see it in your periphery! You're almost there, why not just skip??) At the same time, though, the exchange of arguments is not just central to philosophy, but also to every ideal notion of democratic politics we can conceive: legitimate persuasion is always distinguished from sophistry, reasons from lies and force. A little thinking about thinking sometimes clears my head. Because while I think it is important to keep the norms sharp, I also now think that any particular violation is necessarily a fuzzy issue.



115. A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.

119. The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.

125. The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules.

This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand (i.e. get a clear view of).

It throws light on our concept of *meaning* something. For in those cases things turn out otherwise than we had meant, foreseen. This is just what we say when, for example, a contradiction appears: "I didn't mean it like that."

The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem.

217. "How am I able to obey a rule?"—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about justification for my following the rule in the way I do.

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do."

stubbornness and sublime ingenuity, two un-budged Zax in a cold, cold prairie of Prax, locked in immortal dialectical combat.



“The Snow Man”

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

— Stevens



“YANKEE DOODLE, in a word, is really a clever, hearty, humorous, catholic, liberal-minded, whole-souled fellow who means well by the whole world, (he’d shake hands kindly with the devil if he came up to be a *bona-fide* citizen of the United States,) but you mustn’t attempt to ‘run’ him, for he pays back a hundred tricks for one.” — *Yankee Doodle*, Oct 1846, first issue



“So you think you can tell heaven from hell? Blue skies from pain? Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail? A smile from a veil? Do you think you can tell?” — Pink Floyd

Aristotle—I was surprised to pick up that the *Refutations* was one of the major textbooks out of Aristotle’s corpus.) Around the time that people started toying around with whether math was the same as logic—this post-Cartesian period—fallacies began to fall away from the subject of logic, and at the same time experimental science (under the very different aegis of Bacon) began to lessen the influence of the *Analytics*.

The turning point seems to be the 19th century (which I would title a book). The last gasp of the Aristotelian tradition of logic-books is John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843), with Francis Bowen’s *A Treatise of Logic* (1865) being maybe the last major American textbook in that vein (and Alexander Bain’s 1870 Millian textbook for the British). Bowen dates accurately (according to subsequent historians) the revival of logic in British and American intellectual communities to (Archbishop) Richard Whately’s *Elements of Logic* of 1826, which both Mill and Bowen draw heavily on. There was a prejudice against logic since Locke, but Whately’s traditional, Aristotelian orientation to logic would soon be overcome by the rise of mathematical, or symbolic, logic—Boole (yes, that Boole, of the operators), his *X* was published in *Y* and De Morgan’s *P* in *Q*, and then Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* in *lookitupyourself#variablejokes*. After Frege (in the 1870s, if you didn’t look it up), logic became “modern logic” and was never the same. Mill and Bowen are aware of De Morgan, but Bowen pretty much ignores him (and mathematical logic) except as a stimulus to his hero, Sir William Hamilton, an entirely forgotten transitional figure (like Bowen himself). Mill and Bain seem to respect the math people, but their goals for logic are more at the intersection with the exploding experimental sciences. Mill is said to have done for the inductive sciences what Aristotle did for the deductive (with his analysis of the syllogism), but considering what math did to the latter (take it over), we should never have been surprised that the philosophy of science, child of Mill’s book, didn’t become anything more than a hanger-on, part of science’s entourage, cheering their friend’s real work and booing the haters.

So while Mill, Bowen, and Bain all have sections on fallacies, these disappear from logic books after Frege. It had always been recognized, since Aristotle, that fallacies were not part of logic proper because the *form* of something is different than its *activity*. There’s the *form* of your jump shot, or serve, or left hook, or name, and then there’s your shitty shooting or penmanship. Fallacies had a home in both Aristotle’s *Organon* and his *Rhetoric*, where logic finds its place in what he called (and we still teach as) *logos* appeals. So as mathematical logic heated up in the 19th century, discussion of fallacies began to be permanently displaced into the subject of

or clarify ourselves, make ourselves more precise. ‘Why?’ Because if beliefs lead to actions, and the actions get us into trouble, then we should change our beliefs. ‘Why?’ Because only insane people, it has been said, do the same thing expecting different results. Thinking, and thus philosophy, maybe we can say, is a kind of controlled insanity, where you suspend action to think through longer chains of possible consequences before choosing which route you’ll take toward an action. If you keep cutting off the tilt toward action, then you cast doubt on the worth of the thinking.

9. But let’s take a real, er political example you may have heard recently. Say a lawyer is arguing that the Fourteenth Amendment’s prohibition against insurrectionists running for office if they have violated an oath to defend the Constitution shouldn’t count for people who only run for President of the United States. Why? ‘First, because the Fourteenth Amendment specifies that insurrectionists cannot be *officers*, not *hold an office*.’ What is a person who holds an office? ‘An officeholder.’ Do officers hold offices? ‘Of course. That’s what makes them officers.’ So what’s the difference between an officer and an officeholder? ‘An officeholder is one who holds an office but isn’t an officer.’ If all officers are officeholders, but not all officeholders are officers, how do I tell which officeholders are not officers? How do I tell the difference between the two? ‘One is the President of the United States, the other is everyone else.’ That’s what Justice Sotomayor called a “gerrymandered” distinction, an *ad hoc* distinction rather than a principled one. It doesn’t follow a rule that applies every time, but rather carves out an exception for the purpose of it not applying this particular time. The criterion for distinguishing between officer and officeholder is that an officeholder is an officer for whom rules about officers don’t apply. That’s pretty convenient and why *ad hoc* distinctions are usually rejected if their only purpose is to let you win an argument.

‘Aren’t all distinctions *ad hoc*?’ Yes, meaning, I do think that all distinctions are made by people for a purpose, and not facts in the world waiting for people to discover them. ‘So how do we tell the difference between good and bad *ad hoc* distinctions? What’s the criterion *you’re* using?’ When you’re worried about someone else’s distinctions, you enter into the dialectic to force them to present the motivating reasons for them. In the officer/officeholder case, what they don’t want to say is that the distinction is for this one dude, and this one dude only—it is for *all* Presidents. But why? That’s where answers from conservatives defending this position become unpersuasive, since they probably would prosecute a President of the political party they don’t like. We don’t know that they wouldn’t, but it just seems silly to believe them. But there is revealed the

Sermon: Future Perfect

Emerson's first job was as a pastor for a Unitarian church, already fairly liberal doctrinally. Yet Emerson couldn't help picking a fight anyways and drew the line at saying the Lord's Prayer. It did not seem *true* to him anymore, in the sense of *ringing true*—it was a dead usage, and Emerson refused to endorse it himself, though he would not take it from others if it still tolled true to them. When the Second Church of Boston also refused to let him pass on Lord's-Prayer duties, Emerson quit. In other words, Emerson quit his job because of the constraints of self-reliance.

One must be a nonconformist to be self-reliant, say today what you think in hard words though it contradict what you said yesterday, write *whim* on the lintels, imitation is suicide, vibrating self-trust, and all the rest of the hits from "Self-Reliance." However, the earliest moment that should give us pause—there are many—is when Emerson announces, biblical trumpets blasting,

to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost,—and our final thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment.

It *shall* become the outmost? Maybe "universal sense" is some transcended notion of whatever is in your private heart, but it kind of sounds like he's saying that what you believe is going to dominate everyone else and become their belief. This is the providential Optimism that Emerson has always been tagged with, though I think we should ignore it the same way we should ignore that side of Hegel.

But what is it to believe something to be true? I won't take up theory-of-truth quarrels, but to say this: to think something is *true* is, at minimum, to endorse it to others. This is why 'what's true for me might not be true for you' seems paradoxical—if it were **true**, why would it only be true **for me**? Well, because you're not me, first of all—but really we should nip the whole thing off. The ruckus about relativism doesn't (naturally) concern Emerson, but rather *what it feels like to think something true*. "To believe your own thought"—what is it to *really* believe something to be true? That's what the passage answers: To really *believe* your own thought is genius, but what does that mean? It means that you believe that what is true for you is true for everyone, though this belief is in your private heart, and not public. Quite anti-Evangelical, given their emphasis on public conversion rituals, testifying and the like, though Emerson does speak it. But true faith, one can read Emerson saying, is to not need any public corroboration—you *just believe it true*. That sentence embraces the paradox without falling into

For just as common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a *doing*, as an effect of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from the expressions of strength as if there were behind the strong an indifferent substratum that is free to express strength—or not to. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind the doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything. Common people basically double the doing when they have the lightning flash; this is a doing-doing: the same happening is posited first as cause and then once again as its effect. Natural scientists do no better when they say “force moves, force causes,” and so on—our entire science, despite all its coolness, its freedom from affect, still stands under the seduction of language and has not gotten rid of the changelings slipped over on it, the “subject” (the atom, for example, is such a changeling, like the Kantian “thing in itself”): small wonder if the suppressed, hiddenly glowing affects of revenge and hate exploit this belief and basically even uphold no other belief more ardently than this one, that *the strong one is free* to be weak, and the bird of prey to be a lamb—they thereby gain for themselves the right to hold the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey.

——— Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, First Treatise, sec. 13



Begging the Question, V: Final Thoughts

8. One last pet peeve: the use of fallacies to *name* a form of reasoning one has encountered without then *justifying the application of the name*. Just because something *looks* like a fallacy doesn’t mean it is fallacious. That’s the entire idea, in fact, behind the idea of a fallacy—it *looks* like *correct* reasoning, but it isn’t. One still has to justify the correctness, or incorrectness, of saying of a piece of reasoning that it is good (or bad). This shows up most often when you’re arming students with logos appeals, which naturally has its counterpart in fallacies. The most common one we want people to be aware of is the confusion of causation with correlation. But as Hume shows, that’s *all there ever is*—one can’t even *prove* that the white billiard ball *causes* the struck black ball to go flying off the table, only that the infinite series of events leading up to the ball striking you in the face all correlate, one thing happening after another. To teach the fallacy, in other words, one needs a much denser conception of when certain communities will hold a person responsible for some correlating events and not others.

Hymn

O thou, of all the Angels loveliest and most learned,
To whom no praise is chanted and no incense burned,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

O thou who knowest all, each weak and shameful thing,
Kind minister to man in anguish, mighty king,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Thou that dost teach the leper, the pariah we despise,
To love like other men, and taste sweet Paradise,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

O thou, that in the womb of Death, thy fecund mate,
Engenderest Hope, with her sweet eyes and her mad gait,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Thou who upon the scaffold dost give that calm and proud
Demeanour to the felon, which condemns the crowd,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Thou that hast seen in darkness and canst bring to light
The gems a jealous God has hidden from our sight,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Thou whose broad hand dost hide the precipice from him
Who, barefoot, in his sleep, walks on the building's rim,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Though that hast burned thy brand beyond all help secure,
Into the rich man's brow, who tramples on the poor,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

simply could not. Plato couldn't just accept Socrates' quaint assertion that his soul would live on—he had to *prove* that Socrates would be waiting for him when he died. Plato had to *prove* that Socrates way of life, that of rigorous examination, was the best. And since Socrates so often drilled down on what his interlocutors meant by, for example, *piety*, and whether they understood the full measure of their commitment to their central terms, Plato saw that he must understand *Socrates'* central terms, like the dialectic. So he dreamed of a land beyond hypotheses that the dialectic could reach, so that Socrates' process wouldn't be simply *his* measurement of things, but could discover the *true measure*. Everyone but Socrates, and those committed to his philosophical way of life, boxed with shadows, whereas philosophy could see in the light.

Socrates was right that dialectical cross-examination is a quantum leap beyond rhetorical speech-making, but not because it reaches beyond, *sans phrase*. It's simply necessary to make sure everyone's on the same page about the meanings and consequences of the words we use when we form up on different sides of an issue. Why wouldn't that be a discovery in the history of culture? To be sure, it was probably one of the earliest! Any metavocabulary that allows you to ask about meaning and implication—to talk about how we talk—allows this. But “modern science,” as an organized social undertaking, didn't happen too long ago. Maybe it happened like this: certainly there were great speechmakers before the Sophists began teaching it, so likewise great arguers. But Socrates worked *backward*, not forward—Socrates turned arguing into an inquiry of causes, rather than an attempt to produce effects (as in speechmaking and debating). That's why Aristotle happens not too long after, and says the *Topics*, his book on dialectical reasoning, is useful for “mental training, conversations, and the philosophic sciences,” the latter meaning any specialized inquiry. Plato and Aristotle tried, successfully, to institutionalize disinterested inquiry, and from there subjects like physics and biology were able to take more distinct shapes.

Read It! Whenever I open a book of philosophy, I have to be wary of shadowboxing with Plato's metaphysics. It so dominates my imagination that it tends to blot everything else out, and I let the conversation get away from me. What I really wanted to say was this: If you've never read it, you owe it to yourself to read the first book of *The Republic*. It explains a lot about why people who like to argue become bewitched by philosophy. Socrates getting bullied into hanging out with Polemarchus is funny, there's some good bits about getting too old for sex so yammering at each other about justice seems pleasing, and the lines of argument that Socrates explores are clever. What defines justice should concern us, and

articulates a worse fallacy in the *Sophistical Refutations*, “reduced to a state of babbling.”

Since nobody pretends to be reasoning and just says, ‘Well, rocks are hard, therefore rocks are hard,’ the fallacy consists in the exposure of *circularity*, or what Aristotle also calls “reciprocal reasoning.” We might reserve the latter title for a legitimate type of thinking, whereas “circularity” we reserve for a bad kind—virtuous versus vicious circularity, as they traditionally go by. Mill in his *System* illustrates vicious circularity nicely with Archbishop Whatley’s example: “as if one should attempt to prove the being of a God from the authority of Holy-writ.” Compressed here is the problem of justifying your belief in your God from the teachings of your sacred text, and then the sacredness of your text from the existence of your God. If someone else doesn’t already believe your God exists, why would they be persuaded by the sacredness, which requires the existence to be true? They mutually support each other, but in a way even a true believer like the Archbishop knew was bullshit—he says “unfair,” but we know what he means.

4. Things get trickier, however, when we move to Whatley’s second example of circularity, which Mill expertly interprets, and they illustrate 1) why Mill originates the admission that all reasoning is ultimately circular, and 2) why he thereby needs something he calls “real inferences” to exist (to replace what Aristotle and the British common-sense school called “intuition”). Whatley gives the example of “Mechanicians” (a disparaging term for scientists) who “attempt to prove (what they ought to lay down as a probable but doubtful thesis) that every particle of matter gravitates equally.” When confronted with the objection that some stuff is bulkier but lighter, they reply that appearances can be deceiving because particles can be closely condensed (or spaced far apart from each other). “How do you know that?” Whatley asks—“because they are heavier,” comes the circular reply, since the only test for the hypothesis that particles can be condensed, apparently, is that some objects are smaller but heavier. Mill basically says it’s a fallacy of stupidity, though he also says it is an easy mistake to make even for the intelligent and educated.

The concept of *intuition* has a long, complex history—sometimes a faculty, sometimes just a thing you get from the world—but for philosophical purposes, it is whatever plays the role of generating self-evidence, something that is evidence of itself, justifies itself.

However, Mill then says interestingly, “In the preceding example the two together [I assume “every particle gravitates equally” and “particles can be condensed”] form a complete and consistent, though hypothetical, explanation of the facts concerned. And the tendency to mistake mutual

effect have to justify philosophy. This is very much in the shadow of the *Phaedo* and Socrates' death at the hands of democratic Athens. Socrates lost the battle of justifying himself and his probing, dialectical questions and was sentenced to die—Athens thought the gadfly was poisonous, instead of just an annoying biter. From this point of view, *The Republic* ends up being an apologia for Socrates' form of life, the philosophical life of listening to reasons for and against a thing.

Violence from others in your community, however, is at the heart of Leo Strauss's argument (in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*) that philosophy has had to develop at times an esoteric form when open declaration of one's beliefs would lead to persecution, like Socrates. This is a kind of reading-between-the-lines approach, which can lead to all kinds of nonsense, but in the form of *The Republic* it seems compelling. Why wouldn't it make sense for a political philosopher, watching his philosophical master voted to die for *being philosophical*, to be a little chary about expressing himself directly to the voting public? The lesson here, though, is deeply ironic: To cast the philosopher as having to stay underground and wage guerrilla idea-warefare with the ruling powers, whomever they may be, is to make the philosopher out to be like the Brotherhood in Orwell's *1984*—a heroic type, speaking truth to power, or at least speaking truth and avoiding power, or perhaps only like Winston, someone keeping their head down and thoughts to themselves, *pero si muove*.

It turns out, though, that the Brotherhood is probably just the creation of the Party itself, and O'Brien—the dude serving the oligarchs—is revealed to be the philosopher. Just so, Strauss, a true heavyweight of the mind, has become a source of right-wing thought in America, otherwise notoriously anti-intellectual, the antithesis of Socratic self-inquiry. Not just Bloom and Paul Wolfowitz are famous prominent Straussians, but the broader structure of alt-intellectual spaces that has bloomed in the last fifty years owe a debt to the ethos of Strauss's paranoid Plato. Is it any wonder that conspiracy theory is rampant now that the American right-wing has its own information ecology, from Fox News to Hillsdale to DeSantis's education agenda? Richard Rorty wrote during the late 80s about how Straussians were mainly ignored by the political intellectual community, and they repayed the compliment and set up their own institutions, like the Claremont Institute. But now the Heritage Foundation—in the Ivy League of think-tanks—has spent the last year or three writing a literal playbook for a future fascist American presidential administration to deconstruct the executive branch of the U.S. government, a bloodless hollowing out of a necessary American democratic institution. With two other branches of democratic

shows the same thing. Scientific theories purport to be in touch with the world, but Mill's use of "hypothetical" above points to the equivalence—a self-consistent systematic explanation of everything is hypothetical in the sense that *if* you take its assumptions to be true, *then* XYZ consequences follow. This is where predictions come from: a good hypothesis creates logical implications about how the world must behave. It is not that the world *must* behave like that, but then you go out and try and observe it to see if it *does*. Predictive hypotheses *seem* to take one out of the circle and find a point of support, but there is no *final prediction* to close the loop of a Scientific Theory of Everything—all there is is more and more observational facts that theories you believe must explain. And *all of those facts* might someday be explained by some radically different theory on the far side of a paradigm shift in scientific assumptions. It has happened before, and scientists pride themselves on being open to doing it again. For example, Whately's mechanicians did turn out to be wrong about every particle gravitating equally, but not because of circular reasoning. As Mill comments, the Mechanician in Whately's example, had they been thinking clearly, "would acquiesce in the sufficiency of the reason first given, 'bodies which contain more particles are heavier.'" That's not an explanation of particles having equal weight, but a necessary implication of the fact that some things are heavier than others. It is just how things must fit together on the assumption that all particles weigh, meaning gravitate, equally. It turns out, though, as Mill already records in a footnote to his comments on Whately, that scientists do in fact find it more useful to think there are different *kinds* of particles with different weights (e.g. protons, electrons), and even later down the line that they aren't even particles all the time, sometimes waves.

The *world* doesn't give us hypotheses—*people* do. The religious example of circularity seems like it is an appeal to authority, but I think we'd do better to translate appeals to authority as appeals to trust—*who or what do you trust?* Some people trust the Bible as a guide to the world. Where does our trust of that scientific hypothesis come from? Scientists, just as our trust of the Bible and its hypotheses about the Good, the True, and the Beautiful comes from preachers. And why do we trust either of them? *Because our parents told us to.*

It might feel weird to say that the Bible offers hypotheses, but this is just what William James suggested we do in his still controversial "The Will to Believe," which he later said he wished he'd called "The Right to Believe." It is in this philosophical classic that James famously defined *hypothesis* as "anything that may be proposed to our belief." He then proposed that options between hypotheses might be living or dead, forced or

really a problem. The struggle, then, becomes about the problems to be solved, the purposes or goals that *should* be held in common.

Rorty often said that arguing about goals was far messier work. The Rortyan dialectic I just sketched suggests, though, that it is far the more important work. Given enough time and ingenuity, Rorty thought, we could make ourselves self-consistent, but that does not mean we will solve all the problems that should be solved, or even see them as problems. The dialectic above shows that in the struggle between old and new each could divorce themselves from the other, for ceasing to share goals and purposes will eventually sever each other from a world held in common. An abstract struggle over the definitions of words like “knowledge” and “reality” rarely sparks people to blows, and we shouldn’t lose much sleep over them, but the struggle over, say, defining when life begins can have dramatic downstream effects.

Becoming self-consistent makes you insular, cuts you off from the views of others. Rorty wanted an argument with many voices and views, those that could traverse the scale and take into account more—a large conversation, as large as we can make it. But taking other voices and views seriously means becoming conversant in many idioms and vocabularies, ways of speaking and thinking, really *listening* to what other people are saying in their idiosyncratic and not always perfect manners. We do not always reason perfectly and completely about ourselves, so even when our opponents make mistakes in defining their positions and arguing in favor of them, we should not crow, ‘Aha! Got ya!’ because everyone has a right to give it more thought and not simply *abandon who they are because you verbally outmaneuvered them in conversation*. That doesn’t seem very Emersonian either. The real trick is to think through your opponents views as well as they could be thought in order to unearth the hidden springs of belief—seeing those as clearly as we can would allow us to come to grips with each other and what we might want as a group intent on living together peaceably in a society.



It is disappointing to see anyone give even grudging respect to Mitch McConnell, for the same reason that Henry Kissinger shouldn’t get it. I don’t respect the expert use of power unless it’s in the name of What’s Right. To give respect to people for it, irrespective of the ends they deploy it, is just another form of power-worship. Respect people for choosing to do the right thing, not for doing the wrong thing well.

just one volition against another,—we willing to go in for life upon a trust or assumption which he, for his part, does not care to make.

Try this on for size: if a Biblical literalist tells you that fossils are the Devil's invention, they have successfully explained the existence of the fossil record, though they have given up on the social institution of scientific inquiry. We may not *accept* their explanation, but if you really do believe in a magical being intent on deceiving us into giving up belief in God, then why wouldn't this make sense? The problem for us is that it seems as though they've given up on prediction. But why can't they? There are all kinds of things we don't try to predict—like what happens after we die. There is nothing in the rules of logic or rationality that demands one accept this or that assumption; there is only the web of beliefs we try to adjust to our circumstances, the evidence of our experience and thought.



“Too Anxious for Rivers”

Look down the long valley and there stands a mountain
That someone has said is the end of the world.
Then what of this river that having arisen
Must find where to pour itself into and empty?
I never saw so much swift water run cloudless.
Oh, I have been too anxious for rivers
To leave it to them to get out of their valleys.
The truth is the river flows into the canyon
Of Ceasing to Question What Doesn't Concern Us,
As sooner or later we have to cease somewhere.
No place to get lost like too far in the distance.
It may be a mercy the dark closes round us
So broodingly soon in every direction.
The world as we know is an elephant's howdah;
The elephant stands on the back of a turtle;
The turtle in turn on a rock in the ocean.
And how much longer a story has science
Before she must put out the light on the children
And tell them the rest of the story is dreaming?
'You children may dream it and tell it tomorrow.'
Time was we were molten, time was we were vapor.
What set us on fire and what set us revolving

motherfuckers!—while what he’s saying moves *disturbingly* in the opposite, calming direction—shhhh, rest. . rest content. . .be content with whatever the majority decides to call true will be truth, whoawhoa whoaa!! Reality is not a popularity contest, a beauty contest! You can’t just lose your hold on reality because people voted! What if they hate you and are just screwing with you, gaslighting you? What could be more anti-Emersonian than being content to call true whatever the upshot of your encounters with other people come to?

That’s the rippling surface of Rorty’s text. He *wants* you to bite down on the slip from “upshot” to “voted.” Rorty wants to offend every philosophical *and* Emersonian instinct because, in essence, what he is really showing is that they are at war with each other. “Anything goes” is the Nietzschean offense to Plato—truth is not the Sun revealing reality to us, as it really is all around us, but rather is whatever the strong say it is: truth is power. There are no rules, no facts that constrain truth—it is what we say it is. ‘No, no,’ the ghost of Plato says, ‘you have it backwards, you idiot, ***truth is the constraint.***’ And now Emerson’s dæmon, on Nietzsche’s shoulder, perks up and hisses, ‘Ahhh, there’s the rub! I, too, *am* constrained by truth—it just seems to go against what you say it is.’

For “upshot,” don’t imagine Super Tuesday, but instead a Science Conference. Gravity has been the upshot of such conferences for some time now, but on the other hand, what gravity *is* has changed somewhat dramatically over time. This is Thomas Kuhn’s idea of paradigm shifts—in the middle of a major upheaval over what gravity is, there is no upshot, no *truth* about what gravity is. This is what shocked scientists about Kuhn’s argument when applied to Copernicus—neither the Church nor Galileo could appeal to The Truth. When Galileo muttered, “*Pero si muove*”—*and yet it moves*—after renouncing his heliocentric view (‘More like *heliocentric!*’ [Vatican audience laughs]), he only had his conviction that the future would bear him out.

Rorty’s conclusion—that sentence above that he italicizes himself—is meant to provoke our Socratic instincts, our faith in reason, because he wants us to disjoin the idea of truth as a constraint, something Plato added to the performance of his master. But, of course, our real focus should be on the premises, for Article One in the US Constitution of Reason is that conclusions only follow if premises are accepted. Rorty asserts the primacy of rhetoric over logic, again provoking our Socratic instincts, but what are these “flanking maneuvers” that logic and Plato’s idea of Socrates supposedly outlaw? “On my account of intellectual progress as the literalization of selected metaphors,” Rorty says earlier in the third chapter, “rebutting

. . . Well might he exclaim, in his wild way: 'Is there no God, then; but at best an absentee God, sitting idle, ever since the first Sabbath, at the outside of his Universe, and seeing it go? Has the word Duty no meaning; is what we call Duty no divine Messenger and Guide, but a false earthly Fantasm, made-up of Desire and Fear, of emanations from the Gallows and from Dr. Graham's Celestial-Bed? Happiness of an approving Conscience! Did not Paul of Tarsus, whom admiring men have since named Saint, feel that *he* was "the chief of sinners"; and Nero of Rome, jocund in spirit (*wohlgemuth*), spend much of his time in fiddling? Foolish Word-monger and Motive-grinder, who in thy Logic-mill has an earthly mechanism for the Godlike itself, and wouldst fain grind me out Virtue from the husks of Pleasure,—I tell thee, Nay! . . . With Stupidity and sound Digestion man may front much. But what, in these dull unimaginative days, are the terrors of Conscience to the diseases of the Liver! Not on Morality, but on Cookery, let us build our stronghold: there brandishing our frying-pan, as censer, let us offer sweet incense to the Devil, and live at ease on the fat things *he* has provided for his Elect!'

Thus has the bewildered Wanderer to stand, as so many have done, shouting question after question into the Sibyl-cave of Destiny, and receive no Answer but an Echo. It is all grim Desert, this once-fair world of his; wherein is heard only the howling of wild-beasts, or the shrieks of despairing, hate-filled men; and no Pillar of Cloud by day, and no Pillar of Fire by night, any longer guides the Pilgrim. . . .

'A feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude, I seemed to have nothing given me but eyes, whereby to discern my own wretchedness. Invisible yet impenetrable walls, as of Enchantment, divided me from all living: was there, in the wide world, any true bosom I could press trustfully to mine? O Heaven, No, there was none! . . . The men and women around me, even speaking with me, were but Figures; I had, practically, forgotten that they were alive, that they were not merely automatic. In midst of their crowded streets and assemblages, I walked solitary; and (except as it was my own heart, not another's, that I kept devouring) savage also, as the tiger in his jungle. Some comfort it would have been, could I, like a Faust, have fancied myself tempted and tormented of the Devil; for a Hell, as I imagine, without Life, though only diabolic Life, were more frightful: but in our age of Down-pulling and Disbelief, the very Devil has been pulled down, you cannot so much as believe in a Devil. To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb. O, the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of

an argument is to reject a premise—to call false what your opponent calls true. Being wrong is, obviously, always a possibility, so it *must always be possible* to reject someone's assertion. Sometimes we reject the form of reasoning (the conditional, the if-then), but usually it is that assertion of truth, the thing that activates the inference, gives it its power as a GOOD REASON—'P/X being true is a good reason for inferring Q/Y to thereby also be true.' If we reject a premise, we are denying the force of the argument, and asking them to try again. So once again, because we each do it to the other, we will all try to show the truth of what we believe to the other—try to show the truth of the premises of our central arguments. And since we think our positions are true for good reasons (only some of which may actually be obvious), a major step in winning an argument is to get people to reject your opponent's premises: 'if not P, then at least not X.'

Begging the question enters into all of this for philosophers because in *real life*, and *a fortiori* political life, one cannot just safely and assuredly reject the premises of one's opponents. Sometimes it is just really hard to argue against the determined resistance of certain propositions held by certain audiences, like "Rocks fall to the ground" or "Pizza is delicious" or "Trump is the real president." Sometimes we just have to let issues go, and so invent names for these categories of disagreement (e.g. "matters of taste"), but sometimes if the denials are too unbelievable, we need special names for the person, like *contrarian*, *con-man*, *demagogue*, *asshole*, *lawyer*, *insane person*, and *conspiracy theorist*. If people are too intent on rejecting premises, they begin cutting themselves off from the community, and the worth of arguing with them, and ultimately the reality itself that the community lives in. This is obviously bad, but they are following the rules of argument—they are being perfectly *rational*. What happened is that they began to trust very different sources of justifiable assumptions.



The *New York Times* game *Connections* tells against the essentialist view of conceptual categories. In the game, you get a four-by-four box of sixteen words, and your job is to see the *connection* between the four categories that house four, and only four, of the sixteen words. The last game we had *N.B.A Team Player* (clipper, pacer, rocket, spur), *How Fast Something Is Going* (clip, pace, rate, speed), *Tele_____* (commute, medicine, prompter, vision), *"Step On It!"* (faster, go, hurry, move). Aristotle reduced everything down to ten categories (e.g., substance/what, time/when, place/where, etc.), Kant down to four, and Spinoza to one (i.e. God). *Connections* shows how easy it is, with a little ingenuity, to come up with categories to reorganize the world.

“I’m going to vote Uncommitted, so he knows that if he doesn’t change his stance on the Big Issue, it will be a problem.”

“Like, you wouldn’t vote for him in the general election?” I asked, raising my eyebrows.

“I mean—I don’t know, man. But what final power do we have but our vote?”

I drew in my breath, “Yeah, I mean, you’re right—but the other guy, ya know?”

“I know, I know! He’d be a disaster, assuredly!! From experience, we know this. But that’s what I mean—the Big Issue is a Big Deal. That’s why a message needs to be sent. If we do not at some point speak, who will give us what we need?”

“Beautifully said,” I said, moved. I sighed, expansively. “But,” I started, “are you really going to risk that Evil Disaster winning?”

“I don’t know!” Pragathos was beginning to visibly anger. “What else am I supposed to do? This Big Deal is Terrible, the Worst Kind of Thing. How do you choose between two Total Evils? If we are not guided by our principles at some point, then how do we look ourselves in the face, recognize ourselves in the mirror?”

“You know what the many will say?” “Yes, I suppose you know the *hoi polloi* well.” I laughed dryly, “I do. They’ll say you’re responsible. That’s why I always vote in the general.”

“Fuck that, man. It’s *his* responsibility to do the Right Thing! How is it more *my* fault that he loses if there are a million times as many others who *love* the Disaster and actively vote for the Other Side!”

“Aye, it’s true,” I conceded. “It is their responsibility to gain our vote by trying to do the Right Thing. It’s our responsibility to put the best person in the position to do that.”

Pragathos looked at me with a sour look. “That sounds nice, but maybe too sweet. Your ‘best’ is the best *around*—” —we looked at each other and sang in unison “*Nothing’s ever gonna’ keep you down*” and laughed. “But seriously,” Pragathos continued. “The Ideal Best might sometimes be the Enemy of the Better, but the Actual Best might sometimes be that Enemy—because we *have to do better than this*.” Pragathos’ face was flush. “Again, you know better than most, Socrates. We cannot be lulled into thinking the *status quo* is the best we can do.”

I looked at them long. “Yes. The trouble with the floor is that it can look like the foundation, and we never realize how much it is in our power to improve upon it, build on it—it’s simply the *floor* of what we can do. But—sometimes it *is the foundation*, and losing that is to lose everything we built.”

of his re-election; he does homage to the majority, and instead of checking its passions, as his duty commands, he frequently courts its worst caprices. As the election draws near, the activity of intrigue and the agitation of the populace increase; the citizens are divided into hostile camps, each of which assumes the name of its favorite candidate; the whole nation glows with feverish excitement; the election is the daily theme of the public papers, the subject of private conversation, the end of every thought and every action, the sole interest of the present. It is true, that, as soon as the choice is determined, this ardor is dispelled; the calm returns; and the river, which had nearly broken its banks, sinks to its usual level: but who can refrain from astonishment that such a storm should have arisen?



Begging the Question, IV: That's Perfectly Logical

6. Another pet peeve I have is the endorsing use of “logical” and “rational,” like “that’s a rational thing to believe” or “it’s only logical!” Like “true,” those terms have little force when arguing with someone, another lesson from philosophy classes. If someone who disagrees with a point says, ‘Why do you think you’re justified in that?’ and you reply, ‘because it is true,’ you’ve merely repeated the fact of disagreement. You’ve taken a stand, in essence, and are saying it is self-evident. The appropriate response is ‘Then please make it evident to me.’ In both politics and philosophy you have the option of calling your assertions “self-evident,” but in philosophy you have to actually answer for it, by explaining *why* you think it is self-evident, or what it means for something to be self-evident, criteria for identifying its presence or whatever. (In politics, you *do* have to just take your stand by doing one thing or another; the essence of voting is to end conversation.)

Same goes for saying “it’s logical” or “rational” as a reason to think something—such uses have no dialectical force, no force in an argument with a person bright enough to see through it. What could saying “it is a rational thing to believe” mean except “it makes sense to me”? ‘It follows reason.’ What the hell is “reason”? ‘It’s your faculty of reasoning.’ So a rational thing to believe is a thing that you reasoned your way to? Don’t people reason their way to wrong things all the time? Isn’t that the whole problem? No, it is too easy to expose why endorsing something as rational is stupid, except in the flaccid and inoffensive, “Well, it makes sense to me!” Right, now please make it sense to me.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray, now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking; thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me

against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me—so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him against in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and suck-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

“All right, then, I'll go to hell”—and tore it up.

It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; an never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head; and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a



THINKING.

Listen!

This month is a special issue: *Listen!* Such a request can sound awfully like *Shut up!* How we treat others and conduct ourselves, especially in dialogue or conversation, is some of the larger matter I have had in the back of my mind. And for some reason, when this is mixed in with being oneself in the midst of a crowd, as Emerson put it, the Devil shows up. So while this issue is dryer much of the time, the Great Adversary will insinuate himself onto our shoulder.



“...by having the forenoon exercise so late as it is now, the thoughts of many who go to church, are not on the sermon, but on the feast that is to succeed it. You find your audience wide awake; many are looking inquisitively at you. And why? They wish to catch the first word that drops from your lips which may signify to them that the long-short sermon will soon come to an end. If you will just look into an old book called in the Latin tongue, ‘Stratagemata Satanæ,’ or ‘Stratagems of the Devil,’ you will discover, Mr Editor, that the arch-adversary of souls has baits, and snares and traps in great variety and great abundance. May you and I avoid them all.” — N.R., Letter to the Editor, *Christian Register*, Nov. 1836



Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

charm. It has been truly said, "There is a sort of beauty in a wicked action, provided it be well done." Much of Byron's intellectual power has this origin. Milton's Devil wears it like a robe of fascination. The sane law shows itself in ultimates, in the material world; hence the beauty of the tiger, the leopard, and other destructive animals." — Lydia Maria Child, "What is Beauty?" *The Dial*, April 1843

Jonathan Kozol in a recent condensation in *The Nation* of his new book on the horrors of American education:

In chronically underfunded inner-city schools, by contrast, overburdened teachers are too often under constant pressure to suppress the liveliness of children, to keep them silent and immobile in their chairs, and to rigidify their interactions with them. Austerity in funding, for these reasons, has increasingly led to austerity in pedagogic practices and an unhappy desiccation of the personalities of teachers, who are frequently obliged to undergo training in order to develop an unnaturally autocratic presence in the classroom.

A case in point: A teacher in low-income Lawrence, Mass —where children of color, many of them from Dominican and Puerto Rican families, make up 96 percent of public school enrollment—was told by an observer from a teacher-training corporation, who was sitting with two other trainers in the back row of her sixth-grade classroom, that she was smiling too much at her students ("I came across as too happy," she was told) and wasn't standing stiff enough or straight enough while she was talking to them. According to the teacher . . . "I was told to stand in 'mountain pose' and not to favor one leg over another. I was told not to cross my legs. My body language must be in no way casual." She was also told that her tone of voice conveyed too much enthusiasm and that she was giving children too much praise when they did a lesson right or behaved correctly.

The teacher-training experts were speaking to the teacher through an earpiece that she had to wear and which, she said, the children noticed and found perplexing. "Miss," a student asked her, "what's that in your ear?" When another student spoke up out of turn, the teacher was told through her earpiece, "Give him a warning." When the boy kept talking, "Tell him he has a detention."

At that point, she murdered them.

consists of four encounters with interlocutors: the valued advisor, the bigoted abolitionist, father-mother-wife-and-brother, and the foolish philanthropist. It is a *brutal* paragraph, pushing the edges of self-reliance beyond human endurance. For all four have a really good point—*Don't you have obligations to the community? to others?* The valued advisor is pointing out that the trouble with impulse is that there are bad impulses. And Emerson just says, 'Well, even if they are evil, that's me now.' Breathtaking! It suggests an unmovability, an incorrigibility, as if Emerson would not check back again on his impulses, would not cast a second glance if someone asked him to. But as he says later to father, mother, wife, and brother when they come knocking on his door, we cannot spend the day in explanation, explaining why we think X or do Y.

The paragraph is a kind of Self-Reliance Temptation Scene. In all four encounters, Emerson is asked to relax his self-reliance and think of the community. And all four times he releases harsh lessons—*is self-reliance just selfishness in disguise?* It is hard to say; that's one of the risks. What if your impulse is bullshit, just the bile of pent up resentment and fear, and you're led to deny righteous causes like abolition or helping the poor or your family and friends? *I would want to be pretty goddamn sure.* And the only way to do that is self-reflection—thinking about things, considering other perspectives, etc.

Emerson doesn't say that because he is showing off the Knight of Self-Reliance in those scenes. The Knight must be bold, very bold—but not *too* bold.



“In France, as well as England and the United States, much the larger portion of those who read at all, read nothing but the newspapers and the popular novels of the day. The time for political pamphlets has passed away; if Burke were alive now, he would publish his Reflections on the French Revolution in the columns of the Times. The importance even of political discussions in great legislative assemblies is rapidly diminishing; great statesmen make their speeches there only that they may be reported the next morning in the newspapers. At least, it is so in Parliament and the French Assembly; in our Congress, the speeches are usually so poor that editors do not usually think them worth publishing, unless they are paid for it with the public money. The real battle nowadays is carried on in the newspapers.” — Francis Bowen, *North American Review*, October 1849



Rorty's Cartesian Question is: 'How do you know you aren't arguing in a circle?'

—

You might be grumbling about the Benediction and Touchstone—‘didn’t he do an Emerson and Rorty passage for those the last time? Are they *always* going to be them??’—for which I do apologize. No, there are more stones to be touched and texts to bless with. I did warn that those two names hover most around me! But I promise a change of pace next time.

—

“Quite at first I was in doubt as to whether he was a man of genius or a crank. . . . He maintained, for example, at one time that all existential propositions are meaningless. This was in a lecture room, and I invited him to consider the proposition: ‘There is no hippopotamus in this room at present.’ When he refused to believe this, I looked under all the desks without finding one; but he remained unconvinced.” — from Bertrand Russell’s 1951 obituary for Wittgenstein

—

“If we look a little at the history of theology, it appears that errors find easiest entrance there, and are most difficult to dislodge. It required centuries to drive out of the Christian Church a belief in ghosts and witches. The Devil is still a classical personage of theology; his existence maintained by certain churches in their articles of faith; and while we are writing these pages, a friend tells us of hearing a preacher of the popular doctrine declare in his public teaching from the pulpit, that to deny the existence of the Devil, is to destroy the character of Christ. In science we ask first, what are the facts of observation whence we shall start? next, what is the true and natural order, explanation, and meaning of these facts? The first work is to find the facts, then their law and meaning. Now here are two things to be considered, namely, FACTS and NO-FACTS. For every false theory there are a thousand false facts. In theology, the data, in many celebrated cases, are facts of assumption, not observation; in a word, are NO-FACTS. When Charles the Second asked the Royal Society, ‘Why a living fish put into a vessel of water added nothing to the weight of the water?’ there were enough, no doubt, to devise a theory, and explain the fact, ‘by the upward pressure of the water,’ ‘the buoyancy of the air in the living fish,’ ‘its motion and the reaction of the water.’ But when some one ventured to verify the fact, it was found to be no-fact. Had the Royal Academy been composed of ‘Divines,’ and not of

devout descriptivist when it comes to meaning—as Wittgenstein said, use comes before meaning—but *begging the question* is a term of precise meaning as a fallacy of argument. In Latin it was called *petitio principii*, and it means one's conclusion is assumed in the premises of the proof. The most common variety is circular reasoning, the exposure of which through dialectical examination is the central method of showing a *petitio principii*. This I learned principally from the activity of arguing in philosophy classes, though I also started putting my hands on books about argument because my philosophy classes seemed so much more concerned about arguing well than my other classes. I suspect this is because one also learns quickly that there are no facts in philosophy, unlike pretty much every other subject. In this way, philosophy is more like poetry, just with syllogisms instead of sonnets.

Begging the question comes up more often in philosophy classes because everyone, from Plato to Descartes to the postmoderns, is trying to make everything hang together, and becoming abstract is the fastest way to do this. Take Parmenides: Everything, he argued during the fifth century BCE, is a big blob called The One. Boom, done, everything hung. It also illustrates why there are no facts in philosophy—if you have to argue about that answer, then you should assume you'll have to argue about every move you make, every step you take in reasoning. The philosophers will be watching you.

When you're dealing with abstractions it is *easy* to quite innocently smuggle in your conclusion. The history of philosophy is littered with picked apart and picked over predecessors. (I suspect the 19th century was the one to see the rise of Eclecticism, a now forgotten philosophical movement spearheaded by the now forgotten Victor Cousin, because it was the century of overinfluence, the time everyone realized how much thinking and writing there already was.) It is important to have *begging the question* remain a well-understood fallacy because it is a QED move, a knockdown argument, a violation of the norms of reasoning. If you violate those norms, you *must* respond, because if you do not, you will be counted among the dead, the losers of arguments, someone pushed beyond the scope of reason. For when push came to shove, you refused to give up a position though you'd been shown that you should—that is the moral, normative force of reason (as opposed to the physical force of fists). Without those norms, there's no point in arguing, and the Socratic tradition of philosophy can't help but have faith that there is a point. So keeping those norms sharp is an important facet of getting the hang of philosophy, adapting oneself to the philosophical form of life.

person is an idiot (like a Blakean parody of Descartes as the Idiot Questioner), or your sense of certainty really does rest on a ‘Well, it seems so to me.’ It’s at these points that Wittgenstein says “our spade is turned,” we can’t dig down any deeper or further into the web of beliefs that support

To cast off the idiot Questioner who is always questioning,
But never capable of answering; who sits with a sly grin
Silent plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave;
Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair
Whose pretence to knowledge is Envy, whose whole Science is
To destroy the wisdom of ages to gratify ravenous Envy;
That rages round him like a Wolf day & night without rest
—Blake, *Milton*, plate 41

us and give our questioner anything new—we start “babbling,” as Aristotle says, and we’d really rather “emit an inarticulate sound,” as Wittgenstein suggests. Why take those extreme moments of questioning (or *unquestioning*, as in the cases requiring faith or dogmatism) as the paradigm of knowledge, and not our common sense of going-along-unquestioningly-until-one-encounters-a-problem as the paradigm?

This was something like John Dewey’s view, and this has been a little “pragmatist drama,” a play about how Platonism sucks and pragmatism gives us a view of knowledge as dialectical in form. It seems to me pretty simple: if you’re not punching people in the face, you’re arguing with them. All assertions, whether demonstrated or intuited, enter the same arena: the marketplace of arguers. All arguments have the form of a premise-premise-conclusion syllogism, but all premises and conclusions can be attacked. If it is *always* permissible to reject a premise of someone else, then it is always possible to create a dialectical impasse. Because if you do not accept a premise, then you need not be bound by the conclusion—you find the argument *unpersuasive* and therefore do not accept the conclusion that contradicts your position. Then what? Well, you try again to persuade each other (or you start punching), which can produce the same result through the same process: more rejected premises. What one risks, of course, is looking stupid (which maybe precipitates punching). Argument is like wrestling—getting your opponent to accept a premise, something *as true*, gives you a *grip* on them (the grip of *reasons*), allowing you to force them to accept a *further thing as true* because it is a consequence of some other premise in combination. So a wily defense uses ingenuity to wriggle out of consequences for one’s own position, but sometimes it puts you into a pretty awkward and dumb looking position. ‘Really? You’re going to deny...rocks? What, like the *word*, what are we talking about?’ To reject *all* premises—to deny everything and accept nothing as true—is to fall back into a serene mysticism or dogmatic authoritarianism or cynical nihilism or

261. What reason have we for calling “S” the sign for a *sensation*? For “sensation” is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this words stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.—And it would not help either to say that it need not be a *sensation*; that when he writes “S”, he has *something*—and that is all that can be said. “Has” and “something” also belong to our common language.—So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound.

——— Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I



Begging the Question, II: Aristotle to Mill and Bowen

2. Aristotle was the first in European tradition to sit down and try to systematize the principles of our reasoning. The collection of his books about logic are known as the *Organon*, the “instruments” of science. They are sometimes so breathtakingly basic Aristotle sounds like a simpleton. “Let us, first of all, define noun and verb,” one of them opens. But that’s why Aristotle’s books read like a list of high school subjects: he was the first to try and give our existing knowledge some organization. That *so much* of knowledge was organized by just the one guy—it might have happened differently. There seems no particular reason, except that the possibility that so many subjects exist to be organized among each other—for example, much later divisions like “natural sciences,” “social sciences,” and “humanities”—seems a natural consequence of cultural evolution under the guidance of inquiry, the solution of problems through trial and error. You will continually encounter new problems, evolve new solutions, and have the opportunity to ask how all the solutions hang together with each other. Aristotle just seems to be the first to do this for the various inquiries then going on, including the inquiry into inquiry, into how we solve problems and reason about them.

So, due to Aristotle, it was customary for around two thousand years to include in treatises on logic, the form of reasoning, a section on fallacies, forms of “false” or “apparent” reasoning. Not to put too fine a point on it, but that is a long time: until what we call the modern period began, the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* were the textbook that taught people what good science and reasoning was, and the *Sophistical Refutations* taught them what bad reasoning was. (Considering how little the latter is thought about these days—one still learns about the *Analytics* when one learns about

Term Paper: Aristotle on Science

Aristotle's *Organon* is effectively an account of language and reasoning. What Aristotle really wanted to understand was how certainty in knowledge was produced. To *know* something is to be *certain* of something, so the pure form of knowledge is something one is fully certain of. He called this *demonstrative knowledge*, and defined the kind of thing that produced it *science*. The title *Organon* is not Aristotle's, but his later commentators, so thinking that collection of material articulated the instruments of science reflects their sense of what was at the center. His analysis of the structure of what counts as a science is in the *Posterior Analytics*, defined by being *after* a prior analysis. For demonstrative knowledge is produced by *demonstration*, and demonstration is a particular kind of pattern of inference—a *sylogism*, making deduction and deductive inference the form of scientific reasoning. (This will change later, of course, after empirical, experimental science gains traction in the Baconian period, giving life to inductive inference.) So the *Prior Analytics* is an analysis of the syllogism, of three-step premise-premise-conclusion reasoning. But what's a premise? A *proposition*, which is a *statement*, an *assertion of a state of affairs*, the paradigm of which is *X is Y*. One thus needs an account of predication (*Categories*), of how one predicates Ys on Xs, and since all of these things are sentences (*On Interpretation*, with its definition of noun and verb), we'll need an account of that, too.

But Aristotle realizes that not all knowledge is demonstratively certain, *perfectly* certain. For Aristotle's time period, the only kind of probable knowledge they understood was the kind that was fallible because certified by a person, rather than a form of reasoning (the syllogism, deduction). (The idea of statistical probability and the flowering of an experimental tradition changed our categories of understanding only later.) Aristotle called probable knowledge of this sort *dialectical knowledge*, meaning knowledge that was certified by its testing in the marketplace of argument. You say Y is true, somebody else says Q is true. How is the dispute resolved? (Thus gave rise to the great art of disputation, which fell away after the classical (Latin) curriculum faded as scientific education required more room.) One wields arguments for one's position (and against one's opponents') on the *topic* of 'Ys-or-Qs?'—hence, the process of dialectic is the topic of the *Topics*. Arguments are parasitic on the kind of question taken up, so patterns of argument evolve out of the kinds of questions people find worth pursuing. Thus, there isn't a *science* of argument in the same way there can be a science of reasoning via an analysis of syllogism.

rhetoric, which around this time *itself* began to die off. Why? Well, because rhetoric is more like the art of being a reasonable person than it is a knowledge-producing discipline, like physics, history, or math. Universities in the European tradition became beholden to the science-worshipping, German model of advanced education by the end of the 19th century, which attenuated the older, medieval model that is synonymous—perhaps ironically—with what we call a “liberal arts” education (we call it *classical* now). Logic got smuggled into math, and fallacies got lost as rhetoric became tricks that debate-club kids learn. And nobody likes those kids.



Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this is written in Paradise Lost. & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.

And the original Archangel or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan and his children are call'd Sin & Death

But in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan.

For this history has been adopted by both parties

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss . . .

The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it



— Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 5 and 6



‘I learned a new word—*uxorious* means “excessively fond for one’s wife.”’ ‘Awww—wait, not partner or lover?’ ‘Umm, yes, here it says *uxor* is “husband.”’ ‘I guarantee they didn’t coin its opposite because, huh, a wife could not possibly be *excessively* fond of her husband.’

ultimate problem beneath the dialectic—we are always forced, at the end of the day, to make a choice about whether to trust the reasoning or not, to trust that people forwarding the reasoning are *binding themselves to the reasoning*, or are simply saying shit to get you to do what they want.

Here's an example of how distinctions matter, though they can appear *ad hoc*. Consider the following sketch of a scene of argument: Abortion in the U.S. is divided between Pro-Life and Pro-Choice. The difference between the two positions depends on the definitional line between what is alive and what dead, i.e. *where life begins*. Once "life begins," a whole suite of rights and benefits follow, but until that point, people have choices. One convenient line is marked by viability outside the womb—that one gives you a relatively clear definition of autonomy: *this entity can make it on its own*. The earlier one gets, the more one relies on the entity's *potential* for becoming something with autonomy and rights. Since we're all made of stardust, one can imagine how arguing from potential can get out of hand. On the other hand, the later one gets from the point marked by viability, the greater the barbarity of one's choice in where to mark the line. One need only recall Cartman's mom's attempt to abort him at the age of eight (Season 2, Episode 2—still a classic!) to see how that works. The line has to be made, but there is absolutely nothing about the world that will show us how it *must* be drawn.

10. All of this stuff about begging the question is why I've never been that blown away by Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems—they just show, in the idiom of mathematical logic, what everyone from Plato and Aristotle to Bowen and Mill have understood about reasoning. The form of correct reasoning, embodied by the syllogism, is the same as in begging the question and circularity—the name applies to both. In formal terms, and this is what the Incompleteness Theorems show, it appears as the inability for a closed system to prove its own assumptions—Plato knew this when he then yet hoped for a "land beyond hypotheses" (my florid interpretation of *Republic*, 510b), Aristotle when he posited intuitive knowledge (*Posterior*, 72b19-25), Mill "real inference," and Gödel proved it for math, which is as precise of a model of systematic thinking as we will get. But in practical terms, it means either 1) you stop questioning your assumptions, and buy completeness with dogmatism; 2) you stop answering adequately, and buy consistency with ignorance or circularity; or 3) you *do* successfully answer every question posed to you, over and over, and you and your questioner serenely if contentiously converse as the moon unceasingly rises, and the morning inevitably follows, day after perpetual day, and the sun finally explodes or an improbable eternity ensues, and you buy rationality with heroic

the metaphysics of the sentence that follows, when his rhetoric careens out of control into the magical incantation of the future perfect.

Emerson's mode was the optative. But he did not try to persuade anyone to give up the Lord's Prayer, to make any attempt to move toward that perfect future. He spoke it, but not to persuade. To commend the self-reliance of believing your own private thought is true for everyone is thus to commend a very radical freedom of belief. Emerson completely papers over the messy process of what happens with such freedom, but this passage commends itself:

And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster. High be his heart, faithful his will, clear his sight, that he may in good earnest be doctrine, society, law, to himself, that a simple purpose may be to him as strong as irony necessity is to others!

Radical freedom is *difficult*: autonomy—literally self-law, self-rule—is a *task*, one that only you are entrusted with overseeing. Casting off what one has in common with others *should* be difficult, and the divinity here is the draining away of all social ego. It is not an easy demand—darkling we should listen for the self-same song, as darkling we are tolled back to our sole, separate self. Two necessary sounds we must listen for in the dark—one takes us beyond our community, the other brings us back. Is it genius we were called by? Hard to say. Just be wary if you think you hear trumpets.



Inaugural

an augur has got to have caution
and not just a little panache
to know when it isn't an omen
looking down at him from the branch

and an augur has got to be certain
when sorting the false from the true
to discern when the avian curtain's
hiding something that isn't for you

yeah it's awfully hard work for an augur:
interpreting birds for the king
to be up before the dawn chorus
just listening for truth in the wings

— Jane Kundert

In order to consider these communities and situations in greater density we must make distinctions, so the role of *making distinctions* should be considered. There's an old scholastic adage that goes, "When you meet a contradiction, make a distinction." Since the main goal of dialectic is to force your opponent into unacceptable consequences, thereby causing a dilemma, a crisis and thus choice in conceptual direction, the main counter-strategy is to make distinctions to relieve yourself of those consequences. When Parmenides says 'Everything is One,' and you reply, 'Well, you certainly don't look like this rock I'm holding. That's at least two things,' he will say, 'Ah, that rock *appears* to be something different, but in *reality*...' and thus make an appearance/reality distinction to save his absurd monist theory. When Hume says there's no causation, only correlation, and we reply, 'It's funny, but you dodge the rock when it's about to correlate with your face in the same way as if the rock was going to cause you pain,' he'll probably say something like, 'Well, yeah, but my point about causation isn't about how we live practically in the world...' at which point we'll wonder what philosophy is for anyways since these philosophers keep weaseling out of the consequences of their theories.

I was about to say, "Let's take a real example," but it might be better to underscore that those philosophical examples are effectively real and actual—the history of philosophy is littered, as I mentioned earlier, with arguments against monism and Hume's point about causation—and they *should* lead us to wonder what philosophy is for. And they raise that question—*do they beg for it???*—because of our norms of rationality, which the norms of logic make explicit in rules like, "it is a fallacy to beg the question." Why can't you beg the question? 'Because you shouldn't just assume your point, that you are right and that it is true.' Why not? 'Because that would mean you've stopped thinking, and you will just do what you do.' What's wrong with that? 'If what you're doing is harmful, then the only response to you will be *to do something to you*, and that can become physically risky to everyone involved.' Those are something like the norms behind begging the question, and they point backwards to why you believe something. The reason we care about those is because "beliefs are habits of action," a slogan pragmatists like William James and Charles Sanders Peirce picked up from John Stuart Mill's friend, the aforementioned Alexander Bain. If your beliefs did not tie into your actions, pragmatists don't think we should care about them—believe whatever you want. Hume's view of causation and Parmenides' about how many objects there are in the world come to mind. Likewise, the scholastic adage of making a distinction when facing a contradiction, while it can seem weasely, simply reflects the norm that we should be able to change our mind,

O thou, who makest gentle the eyes and hearts of whores
With kindness for the wretched, homage for rags and sores,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Stall of the exile, lamp of the inventor, last
Priest of the man about whose neck the rope is passed,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

O thou, adopted father of those fatherless
Whom God from Eden thrust in terror and nakedness

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

— Baudelaire, “The Litanies of Satan,” 1, 3-7, 9, 12-15
(trans. Edna St. Vincent Millay)



Begging the Question, III: The Wisdom of Petitio Principii

3. Begging the question works like this, and it will be really obvious: Every argument is from an X-premise to a Y-conclusion, meaning *not* X—something other than X. One doesn’t need to argue from X-premise to X-conclusion—that would be redundant and therefore superfluous. Therefore, an *argument against* someone—what Aristotle calls a “refutation”—is to say that they are *assuming their conclusion*, instead of proving it, defending it, justifying it as they said they were going to. “They have an appearance of achieving a refutation,” Aristotle says, “because men fail to perceive at the same time what is the same and what is different.”

So the first structural idea is that *if* you are in the situation of argument, or justification, or any other analogous situation in which *a reason is demanded*, it is *ipso facto* **another** reason that is being demanded. To supply *the same reason* is to thus *end the argument*—it is to stop arguing, justifying, reasoning because one has stopped with the reason, claim, argument already available. You’re just repeating yourself. That’s why *petitio principii* is a knockdown argument—if it is true, the argument has indeed ended. It doesn’t mean you must give up X, that you can’t get up again after being knocked down, but it does mean you have been, as Aristotle

Thrasymachus by the end of that book is a good stand-in for the O'Brien-in-training we should be worried about.

But the opening disturbs me—Socrates doesn't exactly acquiesce to the threats of violence, and Polemarchus doesn't really take them back. Intermediaries do—Adeimantus steps in with carrots, and Glaucon is the one who verbally accepts the situation, saying "It seems we must stay"—*seems*, it *appears to be the case*—and Socrates says, "Well, if it is so resolved, that's how we must act." Hypothetical! Based on appearances! And Socrates only *acts* accordingly, implicitly accepting the situation and never actually conceding that it *has been so resolved*. I think this is a very subtle mode of saving Socrates' philosophical dignity, his desire to be authentic—very Romantic.

The through-line, though, takes us to the ship of state in Book 6, and finally the city of words in Book 9. In the ship of state analogy, Plato laments that the Captain of Democracy, a big dumb, blind oaf, won't listen to the astronomers, who are good at reading the stars, but instead only to the flatterers, bullies, and connivers. Guess who the philosophers, and who the demagogues, sophists, and politicians—I think this just means, though, that it is *our responsibility* to speak more persuasively to Captain Demos. For astronomers, we need to read, not philosophers narrowly, but *anyone who thinks they know what to do*, broadly. There *are* lying demagogues, cynical sophists, and obsequious politicians, but every citizen has a right to their view, and must—I do believe—speak the truth of that view for the health of the polis. But I also believe there are a lot of experts with very useful specialty knowledge, and a lot of generally smart people with more wisdom in their toes than much of the rest of the body politic. Plato's Straussian moment is at the end of Book 9, which kind of reads like it should be the end of the story though there's one more book. After outlining his view that philosophers should thus be kings, since only they can read the stars to guide the ship of state properly, Socrates says in essence, "But, ya know—that ain't ever gonna happen, so we should withdraw from the political scene, and live by the code as we know it in our hearts." It's actually super-ambiguous, but it's easy to read as an abdication of politics in favor of authenticity. That's not a good idea for people on the right or left, not when there is still a political scene. I can understand how Plato might feel that way, having seen Socrates drink the hemlock, but I am more skeptical of those who feel it today.

That's not fair to them, of course, and I have moods of great sympathy for the Emersonian rejection of politics. "Every recruit to your banner makes you weaker," Emerson says startlingly at the end of "Self-Reliance." But...I get over those moods quickly, and would wish to help others out of theirs.

coherency for truth; to trust one's safety to a strong chain though it has no point of support; is at the bottom of much which, when reduced to the strict forms of argumentation, can exhibit itself no otherwise than as reasoning in a circle. All experience bears testimony to the enthralling effect of neat concatenation in a system of doctrines, and the difficulty with which people admit the persuasion that anything which holds so well together can possibly fall."

A "neat concatenation in a system of doctrines" is a nice slap at metaphysics and systematic thinking generally, and I suspect Mill is aware of the irony. Mill is writing on the far side of the proliferation of self-consistent systems of metaphysics, all purporting to explain everything. Two thousand years of dialectical cross-examination—the on-going debate of philosophers—suggested to philosophers that self-consistent systems are a dime a dozen. The Socratic dialectic, *pace* Plato, is good at showing where inconsistencies appear, but it can't tell you where to *start*—whose definitions and assumptions do you start with? Systems are able to proliferate because, without the ability to demand everyone start with their own assumptions, the consistency alone is unpersuasive as everyone can complain, 'Yeah, but my system is consistent, too.' So you end up with everyone just insisting on their own assumptions and begging the question against each other.

This is why modern philosophers still haggle over theories of truth. Mill struggles with the question of whether all reasoning is a *petitio principii* because he recognizes that proof by syllogism will either never end or walk in a circle (which amounts to the same thing) if someone keeps questioning the assumptions of the proof. And inquiry would seem to require such a thing since everyone wants to be right about what they think is true. So Mill asserts that a "point of support" from the world—i.e. something external from the system—is required for trust to be put into that strong chain of reasoning. Hope for that point is hope that the correspondence theory of truth can be shown to work, as against the circularity of coherence theories. It is hope that there is something self-justifying, like intuition, that everyone *has* to believe, instead of everything needing to be argued for. But nobody has ever found such a thing, and we can tell, since we still seem to argue about pretty much everything. The only things that are self-justifying are things no one bothers to justify.

5. Let me skip down the page to the conclusions I think we should draw. The Whately-Mill religious example of circularity shows that the reasoning is contentious because the starting assumptions are learned from the religious believers that taught you that their deity exists and is learned about from their sacred texts. The Whately-Mill scientific example, however,

government protecting and giving cover to the current hopeful fascist with increasing frequency, things are dangerously fragile. And twice I've obliquely referred to Trump because for some reason the media reports the Heritage Foundation story as if all that hard thinking-thought in detail about how to turn the civil state into a fascist state is just going to disappear if Trump loses.

In other words: it is deeply ironic that Allan Bloom's high-minded belief in Socrates and Plato has made Trump their would-be philosopher-king. When given the chance, the Straussians turned out to be followers of Thrasymachus, the power-worshipper of *The Republic*. Socrates would be proud.

Shadowboxing. *The Republic* is about justice, and almost naturally Plato makes the definition of justice about the definition of definition, which is to say philosophy and the process by which we come to define things correctly. Plato's argument basically is that *the best at defining justice must be the best at distributing justice*. Hence the divided line, the allegory of the cave, of the ship of state, and the ancient quarrel with poetry. The latter is kicked up quickly when Socrates dialectically forces Polemarchus to admit that, to follow his definition of justice as *giving friends and enemies their respective due (benefit/harm)*, the just person must be very good at doing injustice, and so must be like Autolycus, Odysseus' grandfather, whom Homer teaches "surpassed all men 'in stealing and in swearing oaths.' Justice, then, seems, according to you and Homer and Simonides, to be a certain art of stealing, for the benefit, to be sure, of friends and the harm of enemies." This seems, on its face, a pretty terrible consequence to accept, so Polemarchus cries 'Uncle!' for the first time.

Plato has the Sophists at the back of his mind, though the poets get the kick. Odysseus is famed for his cleverness, his cunning—*polytropos*. A similar word (*deina*) enters into Plato's argument at this point: "Isn't the man who is cleverest at landing a blow in boxing, or any other kind of fight, also the one cleverest at guarding against it?" (Paul Shorey's Loeb translates the variations as "skillful" and "cunning.") If *I were the wary one*, boxing Socrates, I would ask immediately how he distinguishes himself from his hated enemy, since he's always accusing them of being clever without wisdom. 'Are you now or have you ever been associated with the Sophist Party?' Socrates' problem is that he's a fellow-traveler, for sure, but he actually spoke truth to power, whereas we would quite nearly define the sophist as someone who doesn't.

I tend to be of Protagoras' Party, Socrates' greatest adversary. Whereas Protagoras was willing to accept that *man is the measure of all things*, Plato

avoidable, and momentous or trivial: “for our purposes we may call an option a *genuine* option when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind.” In the following long passage, James says he’s writing about the psychology of belief, but I think it is better understood as trying to get us to turn to a sociology of knowledge, of thinking about knowledge as a product of social communities, in particular expert communities, most of which we don’t belong to. And if you keep in mind the line of thought I have developed about the fallacy of begging the question—viz., that assumptions in lines of argument can never be justified except by further arguments with their own assumptions, and so lines of justifying thought only ever fit together reciprocally (barring the existence of self-justifying assumptions)—then you’ll be in a good position to understand why James, in the conclusion, thinks that “our logic” cannot find a reply to the pyrrhonic skeptic:

It is only our already dead hypotheses that our willing nature is unable to bring to life again. But what has made them dead for us is for the most part a previous action of our willing nature of an antagonistic kind. When I say ‘willing nature,’ I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from,—I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set. As a matter of fact we find ourselves believing, we hardly know how or why. Mr. Balfour gives the name of ‘authority’ to all those influences, born of the intellectual climate, that make hypotheses possible or impossible for us, alive or dead. Here in this room, we all of us believe in molecules and the conservation of energy, in democracy and necessary progress, in Protestant Christianity and the duty of fighting for ‘the doctrine of the immortal Monroe,’ all for no reasons worthy of the name. We see into these matters with no more inner clearness, and probably with much less, than any disbeliever in them might possess. His unconventionality would probably have some grounds to show for its conclusions; but for us, not insight, but the *prestige* of the opinions, is what makes the spark shoot from them and light up our sleeping magazines of faith. Our reason is quite satisfied, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand of us, if it can find a few arguments that will do to recite in case our credulity is criticised by some one else. Our faith is faith in some one else’s faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case. Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other,—what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives. But if a pyrrhonic sceptic asks us *how we know* all this, can our logic find a reply? No! certainly it cannot. It is

“If the tendency of the fallacies is really pernicious, then whoever he may be who is able by lawful and unexceptionable means to bring them into disrepute, will thereby have rendered good service to his country and to mankind. But pecuniary power in a moderate degree must also be aded to this intellectual power if this good service is to be fully rendered. For example, in the printed reports of debates of legislative assemblies, their editor might well point out instances of the use of these fallacies by the usual marks of reference in the present list.

“The lack of sufficient time for adequate discussion, when carried on orally in a numerous assembly, has been shown by experioce to be a real an serious evil to no inconsiderable extent. For this evil the table of fallacies furnishes a powerful remedy.

“In the course of time, when these imperfect sketches shall have received perfection and polish from some more skilful hand, it may be that any legislatoranywhere who is so far off his guard as through craft or simplicity to let drop any of these irrelevant and deceptive arguments will be greete not with the cry of “Order! Order!” but with voices in scores crying aloud “Stale! Stale! Fallacy of Authority! Fallacy of Distrust!” and so on.” — Jeremy Bentham, *Handbook of Political Fallacies*, 1824



The Opening of Plato's *Republic*

The Opening. Socrates and a friend are on their way back up from the docks to go back to Athens proper. Socrates, famously, does not like being away from town. Polemarchus is like, “Hey! You have to stay here at the docks—I command it. I have soldiers with me, and you’ll have to fight us to get away.” Socrates says, “But what if I persuade you to let us go?” and Polemarchus says, “But I won’t listen!”

And then it is just *dropped*—Adeimantus steps in and offers a reason to stay other than avoiding brute force, instead trying to persuade Socrates to stay by telling him about all of the festivities they’ll miss if they leave. Carrot and the stick, I suppose—threaten physical violence, then paper it over with something to be gained. This is an entirely different dialectical line of attack and leaves unclear what Socrates would do if people did not listen to reason, instead stopping up their ears like Odysseus.

Beware Power. Allan Bloom’s translation of *The Republic* might be the most useful available, after all these years. His *Closing of the American Mind* is hokum, but he’s a legit student of the classics, after his master, Leo Strauss. Bloom has excellent footnotes on all major Greek terms as they appear, and a paraphrastic commentary on the entire dialogue that is highly useful. Bloom emphasizes that the beginning of the dialogue is circumscribed by the threat of violence, and that this leads Socrates to in

Lucretius the Epicurean might tell us
'Twas something we knew all about to begin with
And needn't have fared into space like his master
To find 'twas the effort, the essay of love.

— Robert Frost



Canyon of the Sacred Unspoken

Speaking was forbidden. The sun, so loud overhead
that it could be heard for over 92 million miles, was also
not permitted to enter the canyon. Even the sand
whispered here.

Silence had moved slowly, spending many eons
sculpting the walls. The doors and windows came more
recently, and had arrived without asking permission, the
way our bodies don't ask permission to breathe.

No one enters the doors.
No one even asks permission.
For as Silence would remind you,
speaking was forbidden.



THE EVERLASTING NO

Under the strange nebulous envelopment, wherein our Professor has
now shrouded himself, no doubt but his spiritual nature is nevertheless
progressive, and growing: for how can the 'Son of Time,' in any case, stand
still? We behold him, through those dim years, in a state of crisis, of
transition: his mad Pilgrimings, and general solution into aimless
Discontinuity, what is all this but a mad Fermentation; wherefrom, the
fiercer it is, the clearer product will one day evolve itself?

objections to one's redescrptions of some things will be largely a matter of redescrbing other things, trying to outflank the objections by enlarging the scope of one's metaphors. So my strategy will be to try to make the vocabulary in which these objections are phrased look bad, thereby changing the subject, rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on."

This, again, sounds like he's embracing sophistry—Protagoras was legendary for claiming he could make the weaker argument *look stronger*, and thus the strong, good argument look bad. But Rorty means this: People justify themselves and criticize others from their own point of view, meaning from their own premises ("choice of weapons and terrain"). Premises assert something to be the case about the world, are *descriptions* of it. When a conclusion seems to you false, you look upstream to the premises and find the description that seems to cause the problem—for example, that knowledge of the truth should be *like* ("selected metaphors") seeing an object revealed by the light of the Sun. Then you say, 'No, I don't accept that premise *because I think knowledge is more like...*' and replace their description with your own, thus redescrbing the object in question. When your opponent yelps that *that* seems false to *them*, you say, 'No, no, it's okay—it only seems false because you also think reality is like...', and then redescrbe the additional premise and object that formed the basis of the objection. Words make up descriptions, and the repetition of words in certain patterns of description (like of truth, fact, reality, object, subject, knowledge and the like when talking about any one of those terms) shows that if you change the definition of one—*I think truth is power*—you will need to change the definition of others ("enlarging the scope") so that they continue to all cohere together consistently. This, however, will mean that you and your opponent are operating with premises the other rejects, and thus you will each beg the question over the other and be effectively talking past each other ("changing the subject"). Given that direct, head-on argument is impossible from each other's position, the discussion will have to fall back on comparing the relative advantages and weaknesses of each other's positions, descriptions for some purpose or goal held in common. The person with the new idea argues that the old vocabulary doesn't solve some problem, whereas their new idea solves all the old ones plus the unsolved one, or suggests that some of the old ones shouldn't even be seen *as* problems. The person with the old idea argues that the new vocabulary is leaving unsolved some old problems, whereas the old idea did fine enough on the old ones, and often suggests the unsolved one isn't even

Death! Why was the Living banished thither companionless, conscious? Why, if there is no Devil; nay, unless the Devil is your God?

. . . ‘Thus had the EVERLASTING No (*das ewige Nein*) pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my Being, of my ME; and then was it that my whole ME stood up, in native God-created majesty, and with emphasis recorded its Protest. Such a Protest, the most important transaction in Life, may that same Indignation and Defiance, in a psychological point of view, be fitly called. The Everlasting No had said: “Behold, thou fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil’s)”; to which my whole Me now made answer: “I am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!”

——— Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*



Dialogue: Pragathos

SOCRATES: I was sitting outside the Union one Tuesday when I saw my friend, Pragathos. I waved them over.

“What’s up? Whatcha’ up to?” I asked.

“Voting! Have you gone, Socrates?” Pragathos replied.

“Me? No, no. I don’t vote in primaries.”

“No? Ha, Socrates—too much the philosopher, the *idiotēs*, ‘private citizen’ to descend—” “—Yeah, yeah,” I laughed. “You might be right. I just— I want to remain at a remove from the party itself. Like certain politicians: the party always gets my vote, I caucus with them...I’m just not technically a member.”

“And you will try to usurp power in their party.”

I laughed, “Touché! I mean, but really—I also dislike the interparty warfare that occurs. I kind of close my eyes to that, though I understand that some sort of competition has to happen. But—what are you doing?” I asked. “So much a fan of the incumbent you’ve come out to toss your one into the millions? Or—don’t tell me you like one of the eccentrics?”

“No no no”—we laughed. “Nooo,” Pragathos sighed, “actually, I canvassed for the incumbent last time around. I actively supported his election. But—” Pragathos broke off. “His stance on the Big Issue I find unconscionable.”

I looked at Pragathos at length. I nodded, understanding. “So what are you doing?”

Bosola. Oh, my fate moves swift!
I have this Cardinal in the forge already.
Now I'll bring him to th' hammer. Oh, direful misprision!
I will not imitate things glorious,
No more than base. I'll be mine own example.
On, on, and look thou represent, for silence,
The thing thou bear'st.

*Exits, and having murdered the good guys previously,
now murders the bad in the finale.*

— John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, Act 5, Scene 4



Touchstones: Large Argument

We would only have a real and practical standoff, as opposed to an artificial and theoretical one, if certain topics and certain language games were taboo—if there were general agreement within a society that certain questions were *always* in point, that certain questions were prior to certain others, that there was a fixed order of discussion, and that flanking movements were not permitted. That would be just the sort of society which liberals are trying to avoid—one in which “logic” ruled and “rhetoric” was outlawed. It is central to the idea of a liberal society that, in respect to words as opposed to deeds, persuasion as opposed to force, anything goes. This openmindedness should not be fostered because, as Scripture teaches, Truth is great and will prevail, nor because, as Milton suggests, Truth will always win in a free and open encounter. It should be fostered for its own sake. *A liberal society is one which is content to call “true” whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be.* That is why a liberal society is badly served by an attempt to supply it with “philosophical foundations.” For the attempt to supply such foundations presupposes a natural order of topics and arguments which is prior to, and overrides the results of, encounters between old and new vocabularies.

——— Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Ch.
3, 1989

This is one of the wildest passages in Rorty, a virtuoso provocation on the scale of Emerson’s “Are they *my* poor?” and Jesus’s “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Emerson’s “I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me” seems mild next to the next verses (Matthew 10:36-37): “For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. / And a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household.”) It is a tribute to Rorty’s skill as a writer, though, that he’s exploding egregiously—*anything goes*,

“Eck,” Pragathos stuck out their tongue. “We’ve fallen a little too heavy into aphorism.” “Daaah” I looked heavenward, “a hazard I run everyday hanging out around here!”

As our laughs eased, Pragathos shook their head and said, “Listen—I don’t know what I am supposed to do, and that makes me mad, too, that he’d put me in this position, making me complicit in it. And I know,” Pragathos said raising his hand, cutting me off, “I should be more angry at the Disaster and everyone who put him into power, especially those full well knowing he *was* a Disaster. And I *am* angrier at them, I truly am. But this is a problem with democracy, too. Votes are words made flesh, the spirit becoming a physical force—but it is spent in the act, and in fact only has force before the act, like a magnet pulling the politician toward you. Any negotiator will tell you that you cannot take leaving the table off the table, for a captive audience is a hostage, not a citizen.” Pragathos stopped and wrinkled his brow as my lips parted, amused. Pragathos laughed, “Okay, okay—you know what I mean. Politics is necessarily a barter system, with all of the consequences for the ship of state. The Demos might be blind and dumb, as you’ve said, Socrates, but they are far better trusted than any one unimpeachable person, self-satisfied in their supposedly superior vision, deciding everything for everyone else. And that’s just why we need to make our force felt.”

Pragathos scratched their head and looked down for a while. I sighed. “Democracy is a risky business. To vote scatters your force, but to not vote—that’s to have no force at all.” “Ha, right” Pragathos crowed, “like you!” We laughed. “It wouldn’t be so bad if there weren’t such a vast reservoir of people not paying attention, or who’ve had such a poor education in civic norms and manners...” “Uh-oh, the school marm is here.” “Ha ha ha,” I chuckled dryly. “All right, go on—do your civic duty and fuck up the incumbent’s poll numbers.” Pragathos stuck out his tongue and waved me off.



So I was full of trouble, full as I could be; and didn’t know what to do. At last I had an idea; and I says, I’ll go and write the letter—and *then* see if I can pray. Why, it was astonishing, the way I felt as light as a feather, right straight off, and my troubles all gone. So I got a piece of paper and a pencil, all glad and excited, and set down and wrote:

Miss Watson your runaway n_____ Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send. HUCK FINN.

What is objectionable about the endorsing uses, in fact, is that they beg the question. This is the fact that Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida all understood about philosophical tradition and why Derrida coined “logocentrism.” It’s even plainer in the case of “that’s logical.” Logic describes the *form* of reasoning, specifically distinguished from the *content*. To describe “the logic of X” is to describe how X is consistent, how it makes sense, how everything that goes into it connects. You’re not *endorsing* the logic of capitalism when you describe it. If you lay out a line of reasoning for a point, explain why you think something is true, how it all connects together, and someone asks why you’re entitled to that line of thought, and you reply, ‘because it is logical,’ you’re just repeating your affirmation of the premises that conclude with your point. It confuses *validity* and *soundness*, the first and most important distinction to the field of logic because it *creates* that field by distinguishing between form and content. An argument, a deductive proof, a syllogism—two premises that justify a conclusion—they are *valid* if they do not violate rules of reasoning, like the law of non-contradiction and confusing proving with assuming. A *sound* argument is one that is both valid in its reasoning and has true premises. But how do you know the premises are true? Ah, gotta prove those...and on we go, until someone is shown to have gone around in a little circle.

7. Another way to put the point is that *soundness* is just what is up for grabs in a disagreement. Saying something is “logical” doesn’t have force, typically, because during a disagreement everyone is *always* asking their opponent to prove the premises of their last argument. That is essentially what controversies will always boil down to, given enough time, energy, and physical restraint. Dialectical ingenuity comes from the ability to persuasively reject your opponent’s premises, and thus show that their conclusions do not follow, which forces them to continue by other means.

Let us reason thus: a controversy has this form: You believe Q, and I believe Y, and Q and Y cannot both be true. So we each ask the other to *justify* themselves, to produce arguments and evidence for their belief, *reasons* for why they think it is true. You say P, and I say X, because you think if P, then Q, and I think if X, then Y. These reasons strike us as stupid, perhaps not even on topic (‘X? That’s not even in the right area as P!’) This is the typical dialectical space of argument and counter-argument: you find your own reasons obviously true, and your opponents’ obviously false. You thus provide arguments *for* your own position (‘if P, then Q, and P is true, so Q’ and ‘if X, then Y, and X is true, so Y’), and counter-arguments *against* the arguments of your opponent for their position. The central move in rejecting

starter, I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog.

—— Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Ch. 31



From the Archive: Democracy in America, 1835

The following is a short section from Chapter 8 of Alexis de Tocqueville's legendary anthropology of American politics that caught my eye as I was thinking about how we argue with each other, no less during another presidential election season. The translation is Francis Bowen's, who was the first to correct Henry Reeves' translation, which had upset his friend Tocqueville. "Crisis," I will point out, comes from the Greek *krisis* for "decision," before passing into medical terminology, which is why we think of it as bad shit going down—it's the point at which decisions must be made. I've been conditioned by Harold Bloom, as he writes about the "crisis lyric" in *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*, to further think of these moments as having a "crossing point," like when two roads diverge in a yellow wood, and you cannot travel both and be one traveler. The choice, forced upon us by time yellowing around us, is where we cross over, a turning point for us. And finally, I think it significant that *trope* means *turn*, which suggests that the resolution of a crisis requires myth-making on our part to make the turn in one direction or the other. Consider how the President becomes a "symbol and personification" below.

———

CRISIS OF THE ELECTION.

The Election may be considered as a Moment of National Crisis. — Why. — Passions of the People. — Anxiety of the President. — Calm which succeeds the Agitation of the Election.

I have shown what the circumstances are which favored the adoption of the elective system in the United States, and what precautions were taken by the legislators to obviate its dangers. The Americans are accustomed to all kinds of elections; and they knew by experience the utmost degree of excitement which is compatible with security. The vast extent of the country and the dissemination of the inhabitants render a collision between parties

less probable and less dangerous there than elsewhere. The political circumstances under which the elections have been carried on have not, as yet, caused any real danger. Still, the epoch of the election of the President of the United States may be considered as a crisis in the affairs of the nation. The influence which the President exercises on public business is no doubt feeble and indirect; but the choice of the President, though of small importance to each individual citizen, concerns the citizens collectively; and however trifling an interest may be, it assumes a great degree of importance as soon as it becomes general. The President possesses, in comparison with the kings of Europe, but few means of creating partisans; but the places which are at his disposal are sufficiently numerous to interest, directly or indirectly, several thousand electors in his success. [Bowen adds a note: "Owing to the increase of patronage already referred to as necessarily produced by the vast increase of the population, this influence has now become excessive, and very dangerous." I will add that while Bowen's earlier point about patronage was principally about the size of the federal government—the two problems dovetailing because most of those posts were, at the time, given out patronage-style to friends—here it is specifically a patronage problem, the problem of people who would vote simply to hold on to their job. The so-called "deep state," or what Marxists started calling the "managerial class" before conservatives took over the nomenclature, did relieve some of that problem, but we can see more clearly how size again interacts with this: it stabilizes an interest group within the government, one with direct governmental power yet independent of control. In thinking about influence, interest groups, power, and independence, one must also layer in the role of lobbyists and think tanks, who are given so much outsourced work now from especially legislatures.] Moreover, political parties in the United States are led to rally round an individual in order to acquire a more tangible shape in the eyes of the crowd; and the name of the candidate for the Presidency is put forward as the symbol and personification of their theories. For these reasons, parties are strongly interested in gaining the election, not so much with a view to the triumph of their principles under the auspices of the President elect, as to show, by his election, that the supporters of those principles now form the majority.

For a long while before the appointed time is come, the election becomes the important, and (so to speak) the all-engrossing, topic of discussion. The ardor of faction is redoubled; and all the artificial passions which the imagination can create in a happy and peaceful land are agitated and brought to light. The President, moreover, is absorbed by the cares of self-defence. He no longer governs for the interest of the state, but for that